

Message Text

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SUBJECT: STRESSES AND STRAINS IN THE SOUTH AFRICAN LABOR MOVEMENT

(DECON AFTER ONE YEAR)

1. SUMMARY: TUCSA GENERAL SECRETARY GROBBELAAR TOLD THE NEW REGIONAL LABOR OFFICER THE SOUTH AFRICAN LABOR MOVEMENT IS CURRENTLY SUFFERING FROM A NUMBER OF EXTERNAL STRESSES AND INTERNAL STRAINS. CALLS FOR THE ELIMINATION OF JOB RESERVATIONS FOR WHITE AND COLORED WORKERS AND THE ADVANCEMENT OF BLACK WORKERS HAVE RESULTED IN A COLORED BACKLASH. GOVERNMENT ATTEMPTS TO ENCOURAGE BLACK WORKER COMMITTEES AMONG THE LARGELY UNORGANIZED 2.25 MILLION URBANIZED BLACK LABORERS CANNOT SUBSTITUTE FOR UNIONS AND MAY BE COUNTER-PRODUCTIVE. END SUMMARY.

2. DURING TWO HOUR INITIAL COURTESY CALL,
TRADE UNION COUNCIL OF SOUTH AFRICA (TUCSA)
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GENERAL SECRETARY, J.A. GROBBELAAR, TOLD THE NEW REGIONAL LABOR

OFFICER THE SUTH AFRICAN LABOR MOVEMNT IS "CURRENTLY A SHAMBLES."
WITH THE APPROXIMATELY 600,000 ORGANIZED SOUTH AFRICAN WORKERS
DIVIDED BETWEEN THE MULTI-RACIAL TUCSA; THE ALL WHITE SOUTH
AFRICAN CONFEDERATION OF LABOUR (SACL); A GROUP OF 17 UNATTCHED
AND UNREGISTERED BLACK UNIONS, SOME 90 OTHER UNIONS, GROUPED
INTO SMALL COORDINATING BODIES OF SIX TO A DOZEN MEMBERS EACH,
GROBBELAAR SAID "THERE ARE TO MANY PERSONALITIES, IDEOLOGIES,
ISSUES, RACIAL GROUPINGS AND EXPERTS."
ORGANIZED LABOR IS BEING SQUEEZED BY WHAT HE CALLS THE "FLAT
EARTERS" ON ONE SIDE AND "COMMUNIST FELLOW TRAVELLERS"
ON THE OTHER SIDE.

3. ACCORDING TO GROBBELAAR THE ORGANIZATIONAL VACUUM AMONG THE
ESTIMATED 2.25 MILLION BLACK WORKERS IN INDUSTRY, COMMERCE
AND MINING CONSTITUTES A REAL DANGER TO SOUTH AFRICA'S
POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC STRUCTURE. ONLY 45,506 ARE ORGANIZED IN
22 UNREGISTERED UNIONS OF WHOM 17,080 ARE MEMBERS
OF THE FIVE BLACK UNIONS AFFILIATED WITH TUCSA. GROBBELAAR
DISPUTES CLAIMS OF TWO MILLION BLACK UNEMPLOYED AS HE DOES THE
SEMI-OFFICIAL FIGURE OF 200,000. GROBBELAAR ESTIMATES URBANIZED
BLACK UNEMPLOYMENT IS BETWEEN 500,000 AND 550,000.
ANOTHER 130,000 WILL ENTER THE WORK FORCE DURING THE NEXT
YEAR OF WHOM PERHAPS 50,000 WILL BE ADDED TO THE RANKS OF THE
UNEMPLOYED AND UNDER-EMPLOYED. HIS ECONOMIC ADVISORS BELIEVE
THE COUNTRY'S RECESSION IS SLOWING DOWN AND SHOULD BOTTOM
OUT BY NEXT JUNE OR JULY.

4. WHEN REGIONAL LABOFF SUGGESTED TUCSA MIGHT
RECEIVE MORE SUPPORT FROM UNIONS IN OTHER
COUNTRIES IF IT COULD MORE EFFECTIVELY FILL THE
VACUUM AMONG BLACK WORKERS, GROBBELAAR
REPLIED THAT TUCSA HAS BEEN RETRENCHING ON THIS
ISSUE SINCE LAST JUNE. RECENT DEMANDS BY
ORGANIZED INDUSTRY AND COMMERCE IN THE TRANSVAAL
FOR THE ABOLITION OF JOB RESERVATIO AND
THE ADVANCEMENT OF BLACK WORKERS HAS PRODUCED
A BACKLASH FROM COLORED AS WELL AS WHITE WORKERS. THE
COLORED BACKLASH HAS RESULTED IN THE DISAFFILIATION
FROM TUCSA OF TWO OF ITS LARGER UNIONS, THE COLORED
NATIONAL UNION OF FURNITURE WORKERS (WPNPPP MEMBERS), AND THE
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PREDOMINANTLY COLORED BOILERMAKERS UNION (17,000 MEMBERS).
OF THE REMAINING 210,000 MEMBERS IN TUCSA MORE THAN HALF ARE
COLORED WORKERS, PREDOMINANTLY IN CLOTHING, TEXTILES,
LEATHER AND RELATED FIELDS OF MANUFACTURING AND
COMMERCE.

5. ROBBELAAR ADMITTED THAT HE HAS ALSO LOST MUCH
OF THE ENTHUSIASM HE HAD 15 OR 20 YEARS AGOAND IS

RATHER DISILLUSIONED ABOUT THE PROSPECTS FOR ORGANIZING BLACK WORKERS. "THE LAST MAJOR DRIVE BY TUCSA TO ORGANIZE BLACKS RESULTED IN ONLY 2,000 ADDITIONAL MEMBERS AT A COST OF 250 RANDS (290 DOLLARS) PER NEW MEMBER." GROBBELAAR ALSO SUSPECTS THE MOTIVES OF OTHERS CURRENTLY ENGAGED IN ORGANIZING BLACK WORKERS. "THEIR INTERESTS APPEAR TO BE SOMETHING OTHER THAN WAGES AND WORK CONDITIONS."

6. WHEN ASKED ABOUT GOVERNMENT ATTEMPTS TO ENCOURAGE THE FORMATION OF BLACK WORKER COMMITTEES UNDER THE BANTU LABOR REGULATION AMENDMENT ACT OF 1973, GROBBELAAR REPLIED THAT TUCSA IS OPPOSED TO THIS EFFORT FOR TWO REASONS. "THEY ARE NOT UNIONS SINCE THEY ARE PRECLUDED FROM BARGAINING ON WAGES AND WORKING CONDITIONS AND DO NOT HAVE THE RIGHT TO STRIKE. THEY COULD ALSO BE DANGEROUS." GROBBELAAR BELIEVES THE BLACK WORKER COMMITTEES COULD BE PENETRATED AND MANIPULATED BY POLITICAL GROUPS SINCE THEIR PROCEEDINGS ARE SECRET AND NOT SUBJECT TO INFLUENCE BY ORGANIZED LABOR.

7. COMMENT: AS GROBBELAAR'S REMARKS INDICATE, SOUTH AFRICA'S ONLY MULTI-RACIAL LABOR ORGANIZATION IS UNDER PRESSURE FROM A NUMBER OF SIDES AND SUBJECT TO SERIOUS INTERNAL STRAINS WHICH ARE PART OF THE BROADER POLITICAL-ECONOMIC PICTURE IN SOUTH AFRICA AT THE MOMENT. JOHNSON

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